

## **Becoming a Writer of Stories**

*Teacher Timothy Niringiyimana discusses authoring children's stories for use in primary schools.*

When Timothy Niringiyimana was in primary school, his teacher read him a story about a man named Ngunda. Everything about Ngunda was big—the field he cultivated, the amount of food he ate and sorghum beer he drank, and, as a result, the size of his stomach.

"This story was very funny," Timothy recalls. "I had curiosity for reading a book."

He admired his teachers, and became one himself at Ngenda Primary School in the southern province. Now, he's furthering his studies at the Kigali Institute of Education.

While Timothy benefited from this exposure to story in school, the same is unfortunately not a reality for many Rwandan children. On average, in schools across the country there is one English storybook available for every three children, and one in Kinyarwanda for every six children. According to Timothy, Ngenda Primary School hardly has any storybooks at all, and children even take turns taking text books home. One reason for this lack of books is that publishers just aren't producing enough for young children.

As Timothy experienced, stories get children interested in reading, and children need a lot of exposure to written content in order to learn to read. USAID's Education Strategy aims to improve the reading skills of 100 million primary school children by 2015. In order to do so, children are going to need storybooks.

In Rwanda, teachers are responding to this need. Timothy was one of 30 teachers to participate in the first ever USAID-supported Writer's Workshop. The three-day event guided the teachers through the five stages of the writing process, from brainstorming ideas to polishing final drafts, to complete their very own children's stories.

Timothy's story *Kamana and the Big Dog*, based on his own childhood experience, describes a young boy's first encounter with a dog. After running away from the dog in fear, Kamana finally likes the dog and asks his parents if he can have one too. So far, Timothy's story and 25 others have been edited, illustrated by a Rwandan artist, and professionally published.

"I was very happy when I saw this book," Timothy remarks. "I think that the children will be enjoying this story."

Timothy's story and others from the workshop will soon be available to primary schools, and even more teachers, student-teachers, and teacher mentors will have the opportunity to become authors as additional workshops are held across the country.

Timothy is eager to support the effort. In the coming months, he'll do an internship training student-teachers preparing to teach in primary schools. "I will tell them that I wrote a story in order to encourage them to write their own stories," he says. "I saw that the story is very necessary in the classroom."

*Kamana and the Big Dog* was Timothy's first story, but it won't be his last. "In the future time I want to become a writer of stories," he says.

It seems that he already is.